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GLOUCESTER COUNTY

EPA begins the cleanup of drums in Elk Twp.

POSTED: Tuesday, October 1, 2013, 1:07 AM

ELK TWP. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency said Monday that it had obtained a warrant to clean up an industrial site in the township, where it has found more than 1,000 unlabeled or improperly labeled drums and other containers "left in a state of disrepair."

The agency began investigating the 5.5-acre Superior Barrel & Drum facility on Aug. 30 at the request of the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection.

Many of the drums contain hazardous materials and have leaked their contents into the ground, the agency said. Lab results of field samples show the presence of volatile organic compounds such as benzene and other chemicals such as lead.

Part of the site is in a federally protected wetland. An EPA spokesman said the agency did not yet know whether the hazardous materials had leaked into the water.

On its website, the EPA said Superior is a drum reconditioning business. The company could not be reached for comment Monday.

"Conditions at this facility are inexcusable," Bob Martin, commissioner of the state DEP, said in a statement.

The EPA obtained the warrant to conduct the cleanup Friday, the spokesman said. It is conducting tests of the containers and of soil. It is also monitoring the air near the work areas.

"The EPA's top priority is preventing a release, fire, or explosion that could endanger the community or pollute the environment," Judith A. Enck, EPA regional administrator, said in a statement.

The agency is working with the township, DEP, and local fire and police departments to investigate and clean up the facility.

- Andrew Seidman

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